United Nations A/64/751–S/2010/202

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
22 April 2010

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-fourth session
Agenda items 16, 49 and 67

Security Council
Sixty-fifth year

Question of Palestine

Culture of peace

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Letter dated 20 April 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chair of the Group of Arab States for the month of April 2010, I wish, on behalf of the States members of the Group, to draw your urgent attention to the serious matter of the Israeli desecration of the Ma'man Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery, a Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem. This issue, which was raised in a letter and detailed annex conveyed to you by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations on 9 April 2010 (A/ES-10/486-S/2010/184), is of critical importance to the Arab Group.

Since the twelfth century, the Ma'man Allah Cemetery has been the burial site for thousands of Palestinian families, as well as scholars, religious figures and officials. The Ma'man Allah Cemetery was declared a historic site by the Muslim Supreme Council in 1927 and was pronounced an antiquities site by the British Mandate authorities in 1944. Today, regrettably, many of the descendants of the families buried there are now tragically bearing witness to the malevolent uprooting and desecration of the human remains and graves of their ancestors by the Israeli authorities, who are bulldozing large areas of the Cemetery for the purpose of establishing a so-called "Centre for Human Dignity and Museum of Tolerance" atop the remains of the Muslim men, women and children buried there. Additionally, in the past, the Ma'man Allah Cemetery has been subjected to vandalism, destruction and desecration by radical Israeli settlers.

These Israeli actions are being taken in total disregard of the Palestinian heritage in Jerusalem and the human and religious sensitivities concerning burial sites, which are to be preserved and protected. Moreover, these actions are reflective of a deep and callous disrespect for the most basic values of tolerance and respect for the heritage, culture and religion of another people and clearly constitute yet

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another attempt by Israel to erase the Palestinian Arab identity, history and presence in the land, and particularly in the City of Jerusalem.

In this regard, it is imperative to recall that the protection of cultural heritage and cultural property, including religious sites such as cemeteries, is guaranteed by international human rights instruments such as the World Heritage Convention of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Moreover, such actions constitute violations of the right to manifest religious beliefs, the right to family and culture, and the right to freedom from discrimination. These rights and principles have been invoked by thousands of petitioners, including Muslim, Christian and Jewish personalities from around the world, who have voiced their outrage and their opposition to Israel's immoral, unethical and illegal actions in the Ma'man Allah Cemetery.

The States members of the Arab Group also affirm their strong condemnation of these deplorable Israeli measures in the Ma'man Allah Cemetery in Jerusalem, an issue which threatens to further inflame tensions and religious sensitivities in the region and beyond. The Arab Group thus calls upon Your Excellency to give this matter urgent attention. The international community must denounce the desecration of the Ma'man Allah Cemetery and must undertake all efforts to compel Israel to suspend completely its illegal and provocative actions in this regard and halt all construction in the Cemetery, and to undertake efforts to properly, with the utmost sensitivity and conscience, redress the matter in order to preserve and protect this historic, religious site of great importance to Palestinian Arab and Muslim heritage.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 16, 49 and 67, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mansour **Al Otaibi**
Chair of the Arab Group
Ambassador
Permanent Representative